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### **Alumna Majored in Theatre and World Religions to Prepare for Ministry**

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# Alumna Majored in Theatre and World Religions to Prepare for Ministry

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Office of University  
Communications

June 24, 2019

## Bekah Rhea '17 Received Full Scholarship to McAfee School of Theology (Atlanta, Ga.)



Bekah Rhea, fourth from left, performs with the McAfee Gospel Choir in a weekly chapel service. (Photo courtesy of Dr. Michelle Garber, Garber Geektography)

At Gardner-Webb University, alumna Bekah Rhea tailored her education to her interests and goals. “I was originally only going to have one major, world religions. I decided that would be best as I pursued a career in cross-cultural ministry,” Rhea offered. “But when I visited Gardner-Webb, I asked about the theatre program because I’ve been active in theatre since the sixth grade. The faculty won me over. I figured, ‘If I was going to keep theatre, why not go ahead and major in that, too?’ Theatre gives you so many skills that are useful in both ministry and life. Acting allows you to develop skills in presentation, communication, and professionalism so that no matter what field you go into, you can communicate well.”

When she graduated from GWU in 2017, she was awarded a full scholarship to McAfee School of Theology at Mercer University in Atlanta, Ga. She’s working on a Master of Divinity with a certificate in community development. She is seeking a job where she can cultivate relationships between communities and institutions, like churches and non-profits, to create positive, sustainable change.

“It’s a growing field right now, so everyone has a different name for it,” Rhea explained. “The term I use is ‘Outreach Coordinator.’ I want to be a liaison of sorts between the church and the communities they claim to serve. This might mean independently consulting with churches and non-profits to evaluate their outreach practices, or joining a non-profit, or educating congregations on issues of public policy and activism.”

She said her Gardner-Webb professors gave her the academic background she needed to succeed in seminary. “It was the advanced religion courses at GWU that helped me realize I wanted to go to seminary, and that laid the groundwork for all that I am studying now,” she affirmed.

Rhea she also works in the admissions office at McAfee and serves as a faculty assistant to Dr. Graham Walker, professor of systematic theology. She obtained the position with Walker because of her unique double major. “Dr. Walker mainly teaches theology courses at McAfee, but he also specializes in Theology and Culture, and grew up as an MK (Missionary Kid) in the Philippines,” Rhea related. “When I met him, he was fascinated by my choice to combine Theatre Arts and World Religions. He mentioned having several creative projects in mind and not always enough time for them. A few days later, when I went to get my work study assignment, they said that Dr. Walker requested me specifically, because my unique combination of expertise stood out to him as being especially relevant.”

Through her studies, Rhea has discovered deeper connections between theatre and theology. “Theatre history and church history intersect more than you would think, but more importantly what we see in both theatre and religion is the prominence of narrative,” Rhea observed. “Our individual narratives collide to create community and cultural narratives that inevitably influence theological thought. All those narratives, individual and collective, affect theology and the relationship between church and community.”

While studying Thomas Merton, a well-known Catholic contemplative of the 20th century, she researched his poetry and theories as to how art is analogous to religious experience. “Essentially, God is greater than what we can logically imagine,” she noted. “So when we encounter the divine, our words are not enough. We use images to express that experience. Similarly, theatre in general, presents an attempt to harness common human experience, to create and question meaning.”



Bekah Rhea, second from left, chats with some friends on the campus of Gardner-Webb University.